

City disputes report calling

Lodi water official says city wells meet state standards

By Joanna Corman
News-Sentinel staff writer

An environmental group says Lodi's tap water could cause cancer in children. City officials say not so.

The Environmental Working Group, a national, non-profit research organization, in a recently released report found that the amount of an agricultural chemical, DBCP, in Lodi's water is 42 times the safe adult dose and 120 times the safe dose for children.

We would certainly recommend that parents not feed their children any formula

mixed with tap water," said the group's director Bill Walker.

People should "avoid Lodi's tap water to the extent that they can," he said.

Dibromochloropropane — a pesticide that kills parasitic worms called nematodes — was widely used on area vineyards until it was banned in 1977.

State and federal regulators for years have grappled with the question of what levels of DBCP should be considered safe.

The Working Group maintains they are too lax.

Some skeptics, however, say they are

much too stringent.

To spend millions of dollars treating water for DBCP contamination is an irresponsible use of the city's limited resources — especially when there are many known causes of deaths like car accidents and unsafe roads — said Frank Beeler, Lodi's assistant water/wastewater superintendent.

Cancer in humans has never been expressly linked to DBCP exposure, Beeler said. And Lodi's water is perfectly safe, he said.

"You cannot show one person who has
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Water

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over died of DBCP," he said.

"Am I saying people should intentionally expose themselves to DBCP? Absolutely not."

Helmuth Hoff, a retired Lodi physician who studied the effects of DBCP for five years, said the state and federal levels are a "sham."

Sure, cancer has been linked to DBCP exposure in rats, he said, but the levels of DBCP given to rats were much higher than exposures humans ever receive.

"The thing that bothers me is the amount of money that is wasted in legal fees could be used so much better to protect the health of children," Hoff said. "There's nothing that would ever convince me that DBCP at the levels in our water would ever hurt anyone."

The city treats its most contaminated well water. The rest has DBCP levels that are undetectable or in amounts below state and federal levels.

With proceeds won in a settlement with DBCP's manufacturers, the city has outfitted four wells with charcoal filters.

The four had DBCP levels ex-

ceeding state standards, .2 parts per billion, one fifth of a drop in an Olympic-sized swimming pool, Beeler said.

There are no detectable levels of DBCP coming out of the four wells, but some does get through when the carbon breaks down, Beeler said.

In addition, two wells were shut down seven years ago and are expected to reopen next spring with filters.

Ten other city wells, without filters, have no detectable levels of DBCP, Beeler said. And eight wells have a detectable amount, but below state levels.

The city's wells are tested every one to three months, Beeler said.

Woodbridge has a similar situation to Lodi, having two wells out of service, due in part to DBCP contamination. For its nine wells, Woodbridge has an average of .00008 milligrams per liter. The maximum contaminant level is .0002 mg/l.

"So you can see we're well below that," said William Arbogast, utilities maintenance superintendent of San Joaquin County.

Beeler said the study's premises are flawed. It doesn't consider, for example that the human body repairs itself, or that one in four people in their lifetime gets cancer.

"It's all working off a theoretical cancer risk and it's assuming worst case scenarios," Beeler said. "It is basically a publicity tactic that's trying to sensationalize what it's trying to promote."

If the state revises DBCP standards in January and cuts them in half, what the Environmental Working Group recommends, four Lodi wells could be affected, Beeler said.

The group's study looked at DBCP consumption in children.

It's not that a person will get cancer, Walker said, but that their chances for getting it is increased — the government level, he said is one case per 1 million over a lifetime of 70 years.

And because DBCP is a testicular toxin, Walker said infant boys are most at risk.

The group is basing its claims on data analyzed from 38 communities given to the state from test results between 1996 and 1998.

The group says that DBCP which has been found to cause cancer and infertility in lab animals, is still present in many community's tap water at dangerous levels.

The level of treatment is not sufficient because the state vastly underestimated the real dangers of this stuff," Walker said.

According to the group, California's drinking water standards for DBCP exposure are 100 times the safe adult dose and almost 300 times the safe dose for infants.

HICAP

JUST ASK TO SEE A
COMPUTER PRINT OUT OF "EVERYTHING
THAT IS IN THE WATER" AND
WATCH THE RESPONSE YOU GET.

- ① TO KEEP IN MIND, SOME THINGS ARE NOT TESTED FOR
- ② ITS NOT THE LEVEL OF CONTAMINANT THAT IS SO DANGEROUS AS THE MIXING OF THESE CHEMICALS INTO A "SOUP"

38 Communities

WELL WATER